

Improving Transition Outcomes

An Innovative State Alignment Grant for Improving Transition Outcomes
for Youth with Disabilities Through the Use of Intermediaries

Council Bluffs E-Mentoring Presentation

Improving Transition Outcomes with Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services and Governance Group partners Department for the Blind, Department of Education, Department of Human Services, Division of Persons with Disabilities, Governor's Developmental Disabilities Council, and Workforce Development, proudly announces that the Council Bluffs Youth Connections prototype will present at the "A Thousand Roads" 2006 Transition-Parent Educator Connection Conference on Tuesday, February 28, 2006. Youth Connections team members Mary Warren and Karen Gillman with Iowa Western Community College Workforce Development, E-Mentor Julie Boles with Hy-Vee, and an E-Mentee youth will conduct the presentation.

The Youth Connections prototype is one of three community demonstrations implementing strategies to improve transition outcomes for youth with disabilities ages 14-24. Each prototype tests, adjusts and perfects strategies to meet the needs of youth, families, educators, employers and the larger community. Preparation for, securing, and maintaining employment are among the prototype outcome measures. E-mentoring is a critical component of Youth Connections. The prototype currently facilitates E-mentoring and vocational exploration opportunities in the community for fifty-five youth from seven area high schools.

This is the second year of E-mentoring between youth with disabilities and employees of local businesses. Mentors overwhelmingly volunteered to participate again because, in their words, "...enjoyed the experience," "...grateful to be involved," and "I enjoyed the program and I think the



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mentee also enjoyed it.” Youth participants cited improved keyboarding skills and increased confidence in their writing skills as a result of E-mailing mentors. Educator praise included, “all participating 12th grade students completed high school.”

Youth Connections facilitates E-mentoring through Iowa Mentoring Partnership. Mentors and mentees correspond weekly and messages are focused on succeeding in the workplace. Topics include employer expectations, responsibilities, listening to instruction, problem-solving, attendance, working as a team, maintaining a positive attitude, preparing resumes, submitting applications, job interviews, etc. all related to seeking, retaining and maintaining employment.

The students participated in a variety of vocational exploration activities such as company tours and job shadows. Guest speakers from participating businesses visited the high schools and talked with the students about their company’s hiring practices and workplace expectations. Several students were placed with businesses for paid work experience opportunities. Some of the students attended a week long summer leadership camp that emphasized self advocacy skill development.

Noteworthy outcomes from the Youth Connections prototype include youth not only indicating interest in post-secondary education but seniors registered for fall classes upon graduation and businesses hiring youth who participated in work experiences.

The Youth Connections team includes youth and young adults with disabilities, parents, Area Education Agency 13, Chamber of Commerce, League of Human Dignity, Iowa School for the Deaf, Iowa Workforce Development, Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Iowa Western Community College, and Pottawattamie County.

Youth Connections is offered through the State of Iowa Improving Transition Outcomes grant project administered by Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services with funding through the US Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy. Prototype replication is encouraged and tools to assist with replication are under production.

